Expressive Arts Interventions for School Counselors

Suzanne Degges-White
Bonnie R. Colon
Editors

Presents over 100 interventions using creative and expressive arts counseling techniques in school settings. Expressive arts therapies are a rich resource for use with children and adolescents, who are often unresponsive to traditional talk therapy, and highly useful to school counselors who must overcome cultural, language, and ability barriers that are increasingly present in diverse and multicultural school settings. This is the first book written specifically for school counselors about using creative and expressive arts counseling techniques in school settings. It presents over 100 interventions using art, drama, music, writing, dance, and movement that school counselors can easily incorporate into their practices with individual students and groups, and in classroom settings. These creative interventions, based on the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) national Model framework, support the key student domains of academic, career, and personal/social development. The text also meets the important demand for accountability in school counseling by providing guidelines for evaluating the effectiveness of each intervention. Addressing such issues as emotional expression, social skills development, managing anger/aggression, developing self-esteem, working well with diverse peers, career exploration, and academic skill development, the book is organized by specific types of expressive arts therapies and how they can be used to support different domains in the ASCA model. Each intervention outlines the presenting concerns for which it is most useful, appropriate grade levels, required materials, preparation needed, step-by-step instructions, modifications for special needs students, and an outcome assessment plan. A handy quick reference chart helps readers to quickly locate appropriate interventions for specific concerns. Ideal for the school counselor, social worker, or psychologist who may not have specific training in arts therapies, this book can also help trained arts therapists who will be working in a school setting to select appropriate interventions.

Key Features:
• Presents over 100 creative and expressive arts interventions that can be easily incorporated into school counseling practice
• Addresses all relevant ASCA national Model domains (academic, career, and personal/social)
• Provides easy-to-follow preparation and delivery directions and outcome evaluation methods for each intervention
• Includes modifications for special needs populations
• Offers a handy quick reference chart matching interventions to appropriate concerns
Expressive Arts Interventions for School Counselors
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We dedicate this book to all of the counselors who work in the schools, in honor of the work that you do to serve the youth who are our future.
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Preface

Students today are perhaps the most demanding “customers” that school counselors have ever faced. The vast majority of students have grown up in homes filled with technology and on-demand entertainment. Televisions are now personal theaters that can be programmed to offer viewers whatever genre they prefer, as many times as they like, until they are satiated. Smartphones in every hand mean instant connection via text, e-mail, FaceTime, or the old standby, voice-to-voice means. We can rewind, fast forward, or “slo-mo” our lives and still stay connected with our friends and family networks, although we may be losing connection with our own selves. The increasingly short attention span of our youth is progressively more difficult to hold in the classroom and in the counseling office. Thus, we have collected over 100 interventions that invite your student clients to take a break, take a breath, and gain a new take on their lives.

We hope this book will provide useful information that will allow school counselors to stretch themselves and grow their confidence as they integrate these expressive arts interventions into their work with students.

THE SCOPE OF THIS BOOK

This book provides a wealth of contemporary and engaging interventions across multiple modalities. The book opens with a chapter addressing the value of the expressive arts as a conduit to personal growth and development. Also addressed is the integration of the arts into the school counseling milieu. The following six sections of the book each focus on a separate form of the expressive modalities. Within each section, we present the interventions based on the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) model domains: academic, career, and personal/social. The modalities that we include are the visual arts, music, movement and dance, expressive writing/poetry, drama, and a final section incorporating other modes of creative expression. The book closes with a chart that presents the various types of concerns for which students typically need assistance (such as grief and loss, self-esteem, social skills, etc.) and the interventions that may be most effective in addressing these issues.

In addition to providing the basic information necessary to put each intervention into practice, we have also included two additional areas of information.
The first addresses the suggested modifications for special populations—a brief description is provided for alterations that might be made to accommodate diverse student groups. Second, we provide suggestions for evaluating the effectiveness of each intervention. This may include suggestions for relevant check-ins down the road or the use of included pre- and postintervention assessments.

**Who Would Benefit From This Book?**

While this book’s primary audience is school counselors or students pursuing a degree in school counseling, it is an excellent resource for anyone working with school-aged youth, including teachers, after-school program leaders, and community counselors. Although the focus of the book is geared toward school personnel, it is an excellent resource for anyone who would like to add variety and expressive activities to his or her work with youth.

**Overall Value of This Book**

Typically, books addressing the expressive arts are written for a specific modality, such as “Drama Therapy,” “Music Therapy,” and so on. This book provides a wider variety of modalities as well as easy-to-follow step-by-step instructions for each intervention. We chose to present a wide range of activities addressing a wide range of presenting issues. With over 100 interventions, we have covered a great deal of ground, but each intervention is complete in itself. There are plenty of options available based on your preferred modality—whether you are choosing an activity that is located on familiar ground or whether you are stretching yourself to try something new. There is a great deal of creative effort in the contributions to this book, and we hope that readers enjoy integrating these activities into their professional practice to provide students with creative outlets that unplug them from technology long enough to plug into their own inner worlds.
Laying the Foundation
OVERVIEW OF THE EXPRESSIVE ARTS

The use of expressive arts as a healing modality has been around for thousands of years. The arts are the language through which history and healing are transferred from person to person and culture to culture. There are cave drawings, hieroglyphics, and native dances that tell the story of a people and provide a sense of connection. We are born to express ourselves through creative outlets. In fact, singing, dancing, using crayons on paper, and play-acting as adults are all pastimes that children naturally explore, if given the freedom to do so.

Not only are the expressive arts a natural fit for youth and adults alike; they are also a passageway from the everyday to the realm of possibility. They provide infinite perspectives on how things might be in our lives—some more realistic than others. However, only when our clients begin to imagine a world different than their current state is it possible for change to take root. Until we have envisioned a different future, we cannot construct one. In addition, it is in the process, not the processing, of a client’s creative expression that change and growth will occur. However, for each intervention in this book, we have provided suggestions for evaluating its effectiveness. This is for the satisfaction of the school counseling assessment needs, not for the evaluation of the client’s expressive arts creations.

In relation to the evaluation suggestions, we also acknowledge that these interventions are designed to be extensions of the therapeutic work that is done by the school counselor. Each counselor must discover and refine the therapeutic practice that works best for him or her. We are merely providing creative additions to the work in which a counselor is currently engaged.

CREATIVE ARTS MODALITIES

The expressive arts encompass a wide variety of creative productivity. They provide a means through which we are able to express ourselves in ways that often go beyond where counselor–client dialogue can allow us. Multilayered self-discovery and the outward expression of the inner world are possible through the arts that talk therapy may not spawn. A brief overview of the modalities
included in this book are described here to provide you with a basic foundation for understanding their origin, their use, and the organizations that support them. As with similar works, the purpose of this volume is to explore these modalities in depth. We are providing information to raise your awareness of the variety of expressive arts formats that may be used adjunctively within your existing practice. Each of the separate interventions included in this book includes clear instructions for successful implementation.

Visual Arts

The field of visual arts encompasses many forms of art making as well as the use of existing artistic work to allow clients to creatively express themselves without the need for verbal dialogue. One of the earliest pioneers in the use of art therapy was Margaret Naumburg, who introduced art into psychotherapy in the 1940s (Naumburg, 1950). Naumburg’s success led art therapy to be included as a customary component of mental health care in treatment centers. The therapists who followed her lead were generally psychiatrists or art teachers who entered the mental health field. Today, art therapy is a highly specialized area of therapeutic practice and healing and there are numerous degree programs in art therapy, but there are ways in which nonspecialized clinicians can infuse art therapy experiences into their practices. The professional association for art therapy is the American Art Therapy Association (www.arttherapy.org).

Music Therapy

Music therapy first found its way into mental health care on a large scale in part due to the care of veterans being treated in the veterans’ hospitals for war injuries (Wigram, Pedersen, & Bonde, 2002). Musicians, who were volunteers, played to entertain the infirm, but their musical gifts were found to provide curative effects for the patients. It was noted that four areas of functioning are understood to be improved through music therapy—physical, cognitive, psychological, and social functioning. Music therapy can incorporate a variety of different activities, from original composition to being led in specific activities by the therapist. As for most expressive arts therapy disciplines, there is a specific training program for those interested in being recognized as a licensed practitioner. However, school counselors are encouraged to incorporate aspects of music therapy into their work with students. The professional association for music therapy is the American Music Therapy Association (www.musictherapy.org).

Movement and Dance Therapy

In the early 1940s, in addition to art and music as therapeutic modalities, dance and movement were also developed into modes of therapeutic experience (Malchiodi, 2005). In fact, it was the modern dance movement and its spontaneous and highly expressive form of movement that provided dancers with a freeing, health-promoting experience. Then, Marian Chace, a choreographer
of modern dance, introduced this form of freeing self-expression to psychiatric patients who responded favorably. It is perceived that the integration of the mind and body occur during dance and movement and it is this synchronization that provides the salubrious benefits. It is believed that therapeutic movement and dance provide a means by which complex feelings can be processed safely and effectively. The professional association for dance and movement therapy is the American Dance Therapy Association (www.adta.org).

Expressive Writing/Poetry Therapy

Many individuals find writing out their feelings—either in prose or poetry—to be safer and more easily accomplished than speaking the words aloud. Thus, the integration of narrative expression via the written word can be an excellent modality for giving students a chance to explore their inner worlds. In essence, expressive writing provides a safe way to work toward healing and coping with psychological distress. Often, therapists will provide clients with specific writing prompts, and the use of this modality, due to its inherent safety and freedom to explore, has been found to be effective in diverse settings (Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005). Whether clients are working through expected developmental events such as dealing with new schools, family transitions, or grief and loss, or working through environmental and cultural events (cataclysmic weather events, tragedies, etc.) or health and safety concerns, expressive writing has been found to be healing to clients. Beyond expressive narrative writing, poetry therapy and bibliotherapy are also beneficial to clients through the use of the written word, although these may include “prescribed reading” of works that address the issues being faced by clients. The professional association for poetry therapy is the National Association for Poetry Therapy (www.poetrytherapy.org).

Drama Therapy

In the early 1900s, Jacob Moreno pioneered the implementation of the healing properties of drama and self-expression in therapeutic settings in the form of group therapy. This medium of drama therapy is powerful and provides a highly experiential medium of expression. In this mode of therapy, drama therapists direct the action between clients and provide a safe space in which exploration of feelings, behaviors, and thoughts may actively take place. Clients are often encouraged to play out the parts of themselves that they typically inhibit or censor. Dramatic interventions include a wide variety of activities, including storytelling, improvisation, puppetry, enactment, and role play of significant events. The professional association for drama therapy is the National Association for Drama Therapy (http://www.nadt.org).

THE CHALLENGES OF SCHOOL COUNSELING

The roles and responsibilities of professional school counselors have undergone many changes since the profession’s humble beginnings in the late 19th century. Shifts in the sociopolitical, economic, and educational climate are contributing
factors to these changes. Many of the challenges faced by today’s school counselors would not even have been conceivable a generation ago. Schools today have increasingly diverse student populations with a wide range of multifaceted needs. Advancements in technology and virtually omnipresent access to media in schools, homes, and businesses have created a society that demands constant entertainment and immediate gratification. Education reform has raised accountability standards for school counselors while, at the same time, student-to-counselor ratios in our schools have significantly increased. If they are to effectively meet these challenges and provide a comprehensive school counseling program that addresses the needs of all students, school counselors need to have innovative strategies and interventions available on their school counseling “tool belts.” Interventions should capture students’ attention, impact them positively, and allow efficient use of time and resources. The expressive arts interventions that we have included in this book provide such innovative strategies and interventions and also fit well within a comprehensive school counseling program.

The ASCA National Standards for Students

In 1997, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) first published the ASCA National Standards for School Counseling Programs. This was one of the first steps in providing definition and clarity to the role of the school counselor. Since that time, the ASCA National Standards for Students and the ASCA National Model have been developed to provide guidance and structure in the development of comprehensive school counseling programs. Both have been revised several times. The most current revision of the ASCA National Standards for Students was completed in 2004 and can be found on the ASCA website at www.school-counselor.org. According to The ASCA National Standards for Students—One Vision, One Voice (American School Counselor Association, 2004), “The ASCA National Standards identify and prioritize the specific attitudes, knowledge, and skills that students should be able to demonstrate as a result of participating in a school counseling program.” The described attitudes, knowledge, and skills fall into three domains: Academic Development, Career Development, and Personal/Social Development. School counselors utilize these standards in setting goals for working with their students in each of these domains and many of these standards can be addressed through expressive arts interventions.

Academic Development

School counselors can utilize expressive arts interventions to assist students in meeting the standards in the academic domain. Students find expressive arts engaging and more eagerly participate in and learn from such activities. Since expressive arts appeal to different learning styles, such activities lend themselves well to differentiated instruction. Auditory learners can benefit from interventions using music or poetry. Drawing, painting, or graphic design interventions will engage visual learners and drama, movement, and dance appeal to
kinesthetic learners. Students will find classroom guidance lessons that incorporate expressive arts to be more meaningful and memorable and, thus, may become more engaged and motivated in their academics.

**Career Development**

Expressive arts interventions can also be used in working with students in the career domain. Through the use of creative activities students can explore their interests, skills, and values to assist them in identifying potential occupations and career paths and set goals for meeting them. The opportunity to imagine a “future me” through an expressive arts intervention can have a powerful impact on a student’s ability and desire to set goals and work toward that future vision.

**Personal/Social Development**

The use of expressive arts techniques is “natural” in facilitating student development within the personal/social domain standards. Engagement with the arts allows students to explore and understand more about themselves, their world, and those around them, thus making it possible for them to more successfully navigate through personal issues and negotiate social relationships. Since the arts transcend gender, race, religion, socioeconomic status, and other differences, they encourage the development of connections among groups of students. Working together on shared art projects and activities can improve interpersonal communication skills and promote community building.

Addressing the ASCA National Student Standards and meeting the counseling goals of enhancing student competencies in self-awareness, self-confidence, self-expression, communication, cooperation, problem solving, decision making, and so on, can all be met through the use of expressive arts interventions. Each of the interventions in this book indicates the domain standards it best addresses. However, many of the interventions can be modified or adapted to fit more than one domain. The arts provide freedom to imagine, create, experience new roles, and gain new perspectives across multiple behavioral and developmental facets. As students grow in one area, they will typically evolve across multiple areas of functioning.

**The ASCA National Model**

As its title states, *The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs* (American School Counselor Association, 2012) provides school counselors with a framework around which to develop a comprehensive school counseling program. The Model was most recently revised in 2012 and is available on the ASCA website at www.schoolcounselor.org. The framework consists of four components: foundation, management, delivery, and accountability.

The foundation component includes The ASCA National Standards for Students. As mentioned earlier, the use of expressive arts interventions can help support and strengthen the student competencies or standards that make up the foundation of the school counseling program. The management component consists of organizational assessments and tools that help the school counselor
in defining, planning for, and assessing the effectiveness of program activities. Expressive arts interventions can be incorporated into the curriculum, small group, and closing-the-gap action plans that are part of this component.

Included in the delivery component are direct student services. These services include the school counseling core curriculum, consisting of structured lesson plans that are designed to help students attain the attitudes, knowledge, and skills appropriate to their developmental level. According to Graves (1996), a curriculum that is well designed engages students through active learning, a process that involves both action and reflection. Action occurs through directly interacting with “people, materials, events, and ideas” (p. 4) and reflection occurs when students are asked to construct knowledge about those interaction experiences in a way that is relevant and meaningful. Since expressive arts activities involve both action and reflection, their inclusion in the school counseling core curriculum is both logical and appropriate. The other direct services in the delivery component are individual student planning, which includes activities to assist students in developing and meeting goals, and responsive services, which are activities to meet the immediate needs of students and include individual, small-group, and crisis counseling. Expressive arts interventions naturally fall into this component and these are the activities through which such techniques are most apt to be utilized by school counselors.

With the final component, accountability, the evaluation of interventions and the collection of data are addressed. Currently school counselors, like all educators, are being held accountable for demonstrating the effectiveness of their student interventions through evaluation and the use of analytic data. To that purpose, each of the interventions in this book includes an evaluation plan for assessing its effectiveness of use with students.

School counselors today are faced with many challenges and demands on their time. Building a comprehensive school counseling program that meets the developmental needs of all students requires knowledge, skills, and a variety of innovative counseling tools and techniques. The use of creative interventions by school counselors can help to establish an environment in which students are engaged and can explore and express themselves in new and exciting ways. Expressive arts techniques can enhance the development of student competencies and increase the overall effectiveness of the school counselor. Since artistic activities can assist students in identifying thoughts and feelings more accurately and quickly than “talk” therapy, expressive arts are a more efficient use of time.

In summary, we believe that the introduction of the expressive arts into your school counseling program will allow you to grow as a counselor and your clients to grow as individuals. During most of our education programs, we were instructed to “trust the process” as we developed personally and professionally. Integrating the expressive arts into your work will also require that you “trust the process” and will benefit your students. By allowing your students to
experience immersion into the creative process, you are encouraging them to
grow and develop in a way that didactic or directive instruction cannot provide.
Students may spend the majority of the school day in a structured setting with
little opportunity to think outside the box, but the interventions within this book
will invite students to try out new behaviors, new ideas, and new perspectives
through the creative process. Trust the process and enjoy the positive develop-
ments you yourself experience as you find new ways to integrate the expressive
arts into your work.

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